

## Everything Will be Just Fine by Commernator

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Angst, Romance

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Joyce B., Mike W.

**Pairings:** Eleven/Jane H./Mike W.

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-10-05 07:39:52

**Updated:** 2019-10-10 22:45:52

**Packaged:** 2019-12-12 14:21:45

**Rating:** T

**Chapters:** 2

**Words:** 6,700

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Alright so this will basically be one continuous story, but the time jumps between chapters will have anywhere from hours to months to up to a year between them. It should be in chronological order unless I get a good idea for a chapter. The main difference is that Hopper lived but was injured by the machine. The Byers may still move away but probably not. I can't stand splitting u

# 1. Chapter 1

Eleven was still holding Max in her arms with Mike by her side when the military came storming into the mall. The rest of the party was coming down the stairs and jumped at the sudden shouts of "All Clear!" and "Moving Up!" as the soldiers moved down the hallways and into the main concourse where the body of the hideous creature now lay, slowly decomposing. Eleven looked up, throwing a terrified look back at Mike as he came up behind her to wrap an arm around her to help her up. Lucas yelled something and went to run back up the stairs before seeing another soldier and letting out a frightened shriek. El stood up and faced the bright lights coming from the flashlights attached to their rifles. She knew her powers were gone, but she would rather be captured trying to save her friends than be shot down like a wounded animal. Mike went and stood at her side, taking her hand in his as Max continued to cry silently over Billy's body.

She raised her hand, willing something, anything to happen to save them before she heard a familiar voice cry out, "Wait, it's not the Russians, you're safe!"

She paused for a second and let her hand drop to her side. "Dr. Owens?" she said hesitantly, trying to see his face among the blinding light.

He came forward, sighing in relief as he motioned for the soldiers to turn off the lights and lower their weapons. He put his hand on El's shoulder and looked over her and Mike's faces. "Are you two alright?" He asked, noticing several scratches on their faces. "Is it dead?" he asked while motioning to the huge corpse.

Eleven nodded while resting against Mike, motioning to her leg. "Hurt," she said, knowing she was reverting to her old ways of talking due to her exhaustion, but she was too tired to care. Owens looked to Mike for further explanation as the soldiers moved cautiously around the building.

"That... thing attacked her in Hopper's cabin. It put a piece of itself inside of her. We cut it out and sanitized the wound, but she needs a

doctor... It was controlling Billy... he hurt me and Max, and the rest of us might have some scratches and bruises but," he paused, looking down at Billy's body. "El- Jane managed to get through to him, he saved us, but the monster got him... It's made out of people," Mike finished, pointing to the Mind Flayer.

"What?"

"That thing, it infected people, made them eat chemicals that turned them into goop and then they melted down into it-" Mike stopped, looking startled as he finally realized the weight of what had just happened to everyone. He sat down a little stunned and placed his hands in his head.

Owens shook his head and sighed, moving to talk to one of the soldiers as Eleven tried to comfort Mike. After a few seconds he came back and held out his hand. "Come on, let's head out to the parking lot. We'll get you fixed up."

Mike took his hand and wrapped his arm around El, supporting her as they began to follow the doctor. He made it a few steps before glancing back at the rest of their friends as they were escorted by a few soldiers. Lucas nodded at him to go and he nodded back, walking behind Dr. Owens with Eleven at his side. There would be time later for reunions and apologies. They made it out to the parking lot and were directed towards a waiting ambulance. Mike was almost overwhelmed by the amount of soldiers, helicopters, and medical vehicles that filled the mall's parking lot. He moved to lead El towards the medics, but she stopped and turned towards Owen's retreating form. "Hop. Down there," she said, pointing towards the ground, sniffing a little.

Owens glanced at Mike for clarification. "Hopper, he's down there in the Russian base with Joyce Byers and a man named Murray Bauman. They went to destroy the gate," he paused. "I think they did it."

Owens nodded and shouted for a group of soldiers to follow him into the lab. Mike and Eleven were finally alone after what felt like days of not a single moment together. She had her head rested on his shoulder and her hand was grasping at his shirt while he had his arm

wrapped around her. He walked them both over to the waiting ambulance and the woman there helped him sit El down. "You can go over there, there will be another EMT that can help you," she said while pointing to another ambulance sitting a few yards away. He was reluctant to leave Eleven, but he turned to go.

A small, quiet, tired voice stopped him. "No."

He turned and saw the love of his life holding out a hand for him, reaching for him. "Mike. Stay," she hesitated for a second. "Please?"

He couldn't refuse, and the EMT looked too tired to argue, so he sat down next to her as the woman began to clean and stitch up Eleven's leg. She held tightly onto his hand and flinched each time the needle went in and out of her skin. It took the EMT a few minutes to finish, but once she was done the leg looked much better than it had before. She cleaned both of the wounds on their faces, attaching a white bandage to El's cut on her forehead before wrapping a warm blanket around them and telling them to stay put for the time being. So, there they sat, huddled together in the back of a red ambulance as the mall burned in front of them.

"Mike?"

He turned to look at his former girlfriend. "Yeah?"

She glanced away a bit and rested her head back on his shoulder and took one of his hands in hers. "I'm sorry I dumped your ass, I know you were just worried... and I guess you were right, since I lost my powers... and couldn't save anyone," she said, trailing off, no doubt thinking of Billy.

He gently nudged her head up to look at him. "Hey, none of this was your fault okay? No one else will blame you either El," he said, moving to kiss her but stopping short. "Sorry," he said, blushing and moving to pull back before Eleven moved her own head to capture his lips with hers, kissing him for a few seconds before pulling away with a small smile.

"Mike, did you mean what you said? Back at the cabin?" she asked, tilting her head ever so slightly.

He blushed even more, but didn't dare move his gaze from hers. He knew exactly what she was talking about. Hell, it had only been hours ago, before the Mind Flayer had attacked them for the first time that night. He had been worried sick about her, and after everyone telling him to calm down, he finally lost it, yelling about how they were using her and putting her in danger, only to confess his love for Eleven in front of everyone. It wasn't like it hadn't been obvious already. He got her several Valentine's Day cards, he spent every day for six months with her, he spent almost every waking minute thinking about her or talking about her. But everyone knowing he loved her versus him actually admitting it outloud were two very different things.

He was about to say he didn't know what Eleven was talking about when he heard a small voice at the back of his head saying "*friends don't lie.*" He sighed, thinking about the reason they had broken up in the first place and knowing he couldn't lie to her again. She was still looking at him with that same innocent gaze as his mind stopped spinning. He took a deep breath before opening his mouth to speak. "I did mean it El, every word. I love you. I love you so much Eleven. I love you more than anything else in the entire world. I love you more than I ever thought I could love anything. I want to protect you and care for you and love you every single day of my life," he finished, holding her hand and still looking at her, afraid he had made some sort of mistake.

But to his relief, she smiled enormously and leaned forward to kiss him hard on the lips, shocking him for a few seconds until he recovered and kissed her lips back, his hand moving up to her cheek. They moved their lips together for a few seconds before pulling away smiling at one another, each of them a little breathless.

She was the first to speak. "I missed that... I missed you Mike. I undump your ass," she said, snuggling up to him. "Max did not say it would break us up."

He nodded and held her close. "It's okay El, I was being a bit of a mouthbreather after all. I'm sorry I kept you away from making any other friends too. Thanks for undumping my ass," he said with a grin.

She was about to respond when a commotion near the edge of the

mall got their attention. A group of soldiers were carrying something large between them while a few figures followed them quickly. They couldn't make out what it was, only that it was quickly loaded into a Helicopter that took off with a roaring gust of wind as it sped away. Eleven and Mike looked at one another a bit confused before noticing that the three figures were approaching them. As they got closer, they realized it was Murray, Joyce, and Dr. Owens. The weirdest part of this was that Murray and Joyce were dressed as Russian soldiers, and Hopper was nowhere to be seen. The horrible thought popped into Mike's head first and then El's not a second or two later.

"Is Hopper okay?!" they both asked in near-unison, jumping up from where they were sitting.

Joyce reached them and brought them both into her arms, squeezing them against her. "He's alive. He's hurt, but he's alive," she said, feeling them both sag into her embrace. She noticed Will coming towards her and moved a little to pull him into their hug.

"Hurt?"

Joyce pulled away a little to look at El's tired face and nodded. "He got burned by the explosion. They're flying him to a hospital about an hour away. They're not sure how bad he's hurt," she said, trying her best to hold back her own tears. "Owens told me we're all going there, we need to get away before this attracts too much attention."

They pulled apart, looking to where Owens was standing a few feet away from them, talking into a radio in one of the helicopters. He nodded a few times before walking over to them. "Alright, we're gonna fly all of you to the hospital, get you all fixed up, and then try and figure out how the hell all of this happened, and how the hell we're going to cover up this much mess." He sighed, rubbing his face, looking exhausted. Which to be fair, the man was. They were all tired after three incidents with the Upside Down. He knelt down a bit to look at Eleven. "I'm truly sorry about your pops Jane, I'm sorry about all of this," He paused, leaning a bit closer to whisper to her. "I heard about your powers. I'm sorry they're gone. But I'm sure they'll come back. I can maybe help with that."

Before she had a chance to respond, he stood up and placed his hands

around his mouth. "Anyone who isn't a firefighter, medic, or soldier, please come over here!" he shouted, getting the attention of the rest of their party. They all walked over and stood around him in a semicircle. Dr. Owens looked around at them before continuing. "I'm flying you all to a hospital away from here. Before anyone sees you here. There you can get cleaned up, fixed up, and we can get our stories straight, got it?"

Everyone nodded, even Murray, who was too tired to complain about working with the government.

Mike motioned towards where Cerebro was stationed far away on the hill. "Dustin and Lucas' sister are up there. They won't be able to get back easily."

Owens nodded. "I'll take a truck and Steve here to guide me. We'll get them and meet you there. Load up now before anyone comes to investigate the orange glow," he said, pointing up at the sky where a smokey haze was catching the light and reflecting it back, illuminating the sky. Everyone nodded and started moving towards a set of helicopters. Eleven, Mike, Lucas, and Robin got on one while Joyce, Will, Jonathan, Nancy, and Murray rode on the other. They took off a few minutes later and sped towards the hospital.

They arrived within the hour and were loaded into an elevator that took them down to one of the main levels. They were each split up to be taken to separate rooms to be examined. Joyce went with El as Hopper was still unconscious with his condition unknown. Mike gave her a kiss on the cheek before being led away by a nurse into a room with harsh fluorescent lights and bare white walls. She took a blood sample, checked his pupils for any sign of concussion, and told him to wait for the doctor before she left. He sat there, thinking about everything that had happened in just a few short days. Not even a week ago, he and El had been sitting in her bed, listening to "Never Surrender" while they attacked one another's lips. He grinned a little as he thought about Hopper coming in to yell at them, but his grin faded when he remembered that Hopper was now possibly fighting for his life. He began to feel guilty about all of the times he had called the man a shithead or asshole, all of the times he had purposely broken his rules just to annoy him, knowing that he wouldn't do anything because he wanted to keep El happy.

Honestly, Mike understood now why he had freaked out on him. It wasn't because he was crazy, it wasn't because he hated fun or love, Mike had just simply pushed him too far over the six months he had been with Eleven. Mike knew that if he had been in Hop's position, he would have broken a lot sooner than Hopper did. Mike also knew that he would have to apologize for treating him so terribly. Sure, he was still pissed off that Hopper had kept her hidden for a year while Mike was depressed and thinking she was dead, but he also knew that Hopper would have told him if he could have.

Mike also knew that Hopper did maybe have a small point when it came to the amount of time that he and El spent together. Every morning, he would bike over around nine and stay until eight at night, unless they went to hang out with their friends or Mike had something to do with his family that day. Will had really been the one to knock some sense into him. When El had first come back, he had dreamed of playing D&D with her, going to the arcade with her, and having massive sleepovers with the whole party. But those thoughts had been stamped down a little when Hopper had told him that for a few weeks she would have to stay in the cabin, just until the commotion around the lab being shut down calmed down. Mike had been upset until the older man had told him that he was allowed to come and visit anytime Hopper was home. Mike smiled a bit as he remembered the first time he had visited with two duffel bags stuffed full of games and treats and movies he wanted to show Eleven. Over time, more and more of his toys and books had become hers as he tried to catch her up on everything she had missed.

But as time went on, he grew more and more comfortable just hanging out with El. He felt like their other friends would just get in the way. And besides, they couldn't make out with everyone else there. So, he brushed off the dungeons and dragons campaigns and trips to the arcade with his friends. When him and El did hang out with them, they would both lie and say she had to be home much earlier than she actually did. Mike honestly hadn't realized how bad it had gotten until Max and Will had confronted him. Mike could teach El about lots of things and he truly did care for her, but Max could teach her about fashion and makeup and things girls could only teach girls. And Mike and El did have fun when they hung out with their other friends, so it wouldn't kill them to do it more often. Mike



knew that once this was all over, he would have to apologize to his girlfriend and the rest of the party.

A few hallways away from Mike, Eleven sat next to Joyce while she fidgeted and wrung her hands together as they waited for the doctor to come and tell them the blood test results. The environment wasn't helping her anxiety, as the stark white walls and low buzz of the bright lights painfully reminded her of the lab. Every creak of a door opening, every shout she heard outside of their room, and she expected her Papa or one of his men to open the door and carry her off to the dark and small room she was put in when she misbehaved. She reached out to grab Joyce's hand as the woman looked over at her.

"Are you alright?" she asked.

El shook her head and squeezed her hand tighter. "Lab," was all she could respond with.

"I know this is hard for you honey, but you've been so brave and so strong, and I know you can get through this too," she reassured her, kissing the top of her head.

The younger girl nodded and frowned. "I'm worried about Hopper too..."

"I know, but he's a fighter, I know he will make it."

They gave each other a small smile before the door opened, making Eleven jump a bit. She saw it was only Dr. Owens and relaxed a little, but not fully. He shut the door and sat down on a stool in front of them.

He held out a piece of paper for Joyce to take. "The blood tests showed no kinds of contamination, unknown or known. Whatever that thing put inside of her leg, she got it out before it could get into her bloodstream. We'll be giving her a round of antibiotics to combat any infection while her leg heals. But otherwise, she should be completely fine in a few weeks," he said, giving El a smile.

She smiled back while Joyce sighed with relief, thinking that maybe

the mess with the Upside Down would finally be over. "And Hopper, how is he?"

Owens' smile faded slightly as he turned towards Joyce. "First off, he will live. But he is hurt pretty bad. He has third degree burns on his arm and right side of his body, and second degree burns on his face and legs. He managed to survive by hiding behind a large sheet of metal, but the recovery process will be long. He may have some internal damage due to the power of the machine, we won't know for sure until the scans come back and he wakes up," he said as he turned towards Eleven. "Do you want to come see him?"

She nodded and stood up, pulling Joyce by the arm and stood by the door for Owens. "Hop."

Owens nodded and opened the door, motioning for them to follow. They walked through several white hallways illuminated by the same bright white lights that had been in their room. Several nurses and doctors roamed through the hallways, comparing notes and discussing amongst themselves. Eleven was unnerved just a bit at the how quiet everything was. The past few hours had been filled with screams and explosions, and now she was surrounded by silence. She moved a little closer to Joyce and took her hand. Joyce gave her a look of concern, and El nodded a little to reassure her. Owens finally stopped walking and paused in front of a door. "Now, he is bandaged up pretty well, and he has an IV and a saline drip in his arm, along with a breathing tube in his nose. Just don't want either of you to be alarmed when you see him," he said as he pushed open the door."

Eleven walked into the room and her breath caught in her throat at the sight of her dad. He looked weak, weaker than she had ever seen him. His chest was covered by bandages, along with half of his face and various places on his arms and legs. He was breathing steadily in his sleep, and the heart monitor was beeping in a steady rhythm. El walked up to him, tears gathering in her eyes, and gently took one of his hands in hers and leaned down to kiss it as Joyce moved up behind her, placing her hand on El's shoulder for support. Eleven leaned down and kissed Hop's hand gently. "Hi dad... I hope you get better soon," she choked out with a sob as she turned and pressed herself against Joyce, hugging her around her waist. Joyce rubbed her back as she cried, whispering soothing words to her.

They stayed like that for a few minutes until a cough from behind them made both women turn around quickly. Hopper coughed again and groaned, opening his eyes slowly and squinting. "El? Joyce..?" he said, unsure if they were really there.

Eleven laughed and almost threw herself onto him, but stopped remembering he was injured. Instead, she gently hugged him and he hugged her back as best he could. Eleven knew everything was going to turn out just fine.

**Alright, so that is my first chapter of my brand new story! I am sorry it took so long to get this out. I spent months starting stories and then deleting them. I started college so I haven't had much time to write either. This story is going to run for as many chapters as I can do. Hop's recovery, the fallout of the StarCourt Incident, and many more. If you have anything you'd like to see, comment!**

## 2. Chapter 2

After everyone had gotten cleaned up and changed into clean scrubs provided by the hospital, Owens put them all, minus Hopper, who had fallen back asleep, into a conference room. He had explained their cover stories to each of them and made sure they could all recite it by memory. The kids had all been hanging out at the mall while Steve and Robin had been working at Scoops Ahoy when a fire had broken out due to faulty wiring. Hopper, Joyce, Nancy, and Jonathan had all showed up when they heard about the fire because they knew their children were there. Hopper had been injured by the flames when trying to rescue the citizens who were at the mall. Eleven's leg had been cut by falling debris. The residents of Hawkins that had turned into the Mind Flayer had died in the fire. He made sure each of them knew the essential details, so that way, if anyone asked them questions about that night, they would all respond the same way. He had each of them sign papers saying they wouldn't discuss what actually happened that night. For most of them, it was the third time this had to be done, so they were very used to the process. Owens surprised them however by stating that due to the injuries caused, they would each be getting a payout in thanks for their cooperation with keeping the Russian threat quiet.

He said his goodbyes and promised he would be in touch before leaving the conference room to go call the parents of each child, leaving the rest of them to reunite and sleep for a while. Max was uncharacteristically silent and Lucas held her in his arms, slowly rubbing her shoulder. Eleven went over to her friend and hugged her tightly while Mike put his hand on her shoulder. Max looked up at him a bit confused and he smiled awkwardly and gave her shoulder a pat. She nodded, understanding that he was trying to be comforting. Even though they disagreed about most things, it was nice for Max to know she could count on Mike when she needed to.

Over in another corner of the room, a very different interaction was taking place between the members of the Scoops Troop and Will. Steve and Robin were speaking in fast and excited tones, recounting what had happened during the battle against the Mind Flayer to Dustin and Erica, who were hanging onto every single word,

desperately wanting to know what had happened while they were gone. Steve was also teasing Dustin about Suzie, but in reality he was happy for the kid. While he would never admit it, Steve did see Dustin as his best friend, and a little brother he had never had. He wanted him to be happy, and if he was happy with Suzie, that was good enough for Steve. Their conversation switched towards previous years as they told Robin about how the whole mess had started, with Eleven opening a gate to another dimension out of fear.

They told her about the first week they had all met El, how she had stayed in Mike's basement for a week while they tried to find Will. They told her about the demogorgon and the Upside Down and Eleven's powers. They told her about the next year, when Max had moved to town and Will had been possessed by the Mind Flayer, which had given him the ability to sense when it was near him. They told her of Eleven's triumphant return and her closing of the gate.

Will brought them all up to speed about what had happened since the day Dustin had gotten home. He also told Dustin he was sorry they hadn't tried to find him when it all started to go bad, they just didn't have the time and he hadn't been answering. Dustin told him that he accepted his apology and said he was just glad they had all made it out alive.

On the opposite side of the room, Joyce, Murray, Nancy, and Jonathan all discussed what their next moves would be. Murray explained that after Hopper had told the government his position, he would have to relocate. He did say that he would be moving somewhere in Indiana, closer to Hawkins, just in case. Joyce explained that she had been planning to move out of Hawkins in case something like this happened again, which it did. Jonathan was surprised and upset that his mom hadn't told him her plans, but he also understood why she felt the way she did. Any one of them could have died that night on several occasions. Before he could say anything though, she admitted that she had feelings for Hopper, a fact that Murray looked incredibly smug about, having already figured that out a long time ago.

She told them that she wasn't sure what to do now. She felt like moving somewhere else could be safer, but she also knew she wanted to be with Hop. She told them that this was his home, and there was

no way he would separate Mike and Eleven again. She also felt like it was safer to be all together, that way if the Upside Down ever showed up again, they would be prepared and together to help one another.

It was at this point that Owens entered the room and told them that their families had been notified and were expecting them to be home soon. Joyce, Murray, and Eleven decided to stay with Hopper. Nancy and Jonathan would take Will and Mike home. Steve and Robin would take Dustin, Lucas, Max, and Erica home. The latter said their goodbyes and departed from the hospital. Eleven pulled Mike into the hallway and kissed him hard on the lips. They said goodbye and that they loved each other, both a little giddy at the fact they could already say it so much easier. Mike and Will left with their older siblings and then it was just the three adults and El left. Hopper had a long road to recovery ahead, but they would get him through, together.

## **Two Weeks Later**

Hopper came home to a hero's welcome. He may have been in a wheelchair with his right arm in a sling and bandages covering half his face, but the half of his smile they could see was enough to know he was happy to be home. The officers and Flo welcomed him home and told him that he was being awarded a medal of bravery for his actions during the fire at the mall. They didn't stay long as they knew Hopper liked his peace and quiet, and with Joyce and many rowdy kids, that was going to be in short supply.

Since his cabin had been destroyed in the attack, El and Joyce had helped him pick out a new home while he was in the hospital. They brought him newspapers and ads and went to look at homes he liked. They eventually settled on a nice three bedroom house closer to Hawkins than his cabin had been. The party had been busy all week, salvaging what they could from the cabin and buying new furniture to fill up the house with. Max, Mike, and Eleven had spent an entire 2 days painting and decorating her new room with pictures and trinkets the rest of the party had provided. While they would still clash and fight from time to time, Max and Mike had both agreed to try to be nice to one another. They both cared about El, and they knew it made her happy to see them getting along. Plus, Mike knew

he couldn't keep Eleven all to himself, and he was truly happy they were friends.

They all welcomed Hopper home and Joyce and Eleven greeted him with two enormous hugs that he tried his best to return. The day was a happy day, one of the first ones they had had since the incident on the Fourth of July. Jonathan and Steve manned the grill, cooking up as many hot dogs and hamburgers as they could to fill everyone's stomachs. The kids played games and *finally* played part of a new D&D game Mike had written in the past few weeks while El stayed at the hospital with Hopper. It was a grand adventure, in which the original four met two new females, a Mage named Eleanor and a Rogue named Maxine. Mike had even written in some characters for Steve and Robin to play as. All of the kids were quickly becoming enamored by the girl that had been adopted into their fast growing family. She was funny and sarcastic, put Steve in his place, and she was super fun to talk to. Eleven and Max were starting to look up to her like the big sister neither of them had ever had in their lives. She gave them amazing advice and loved to talk to them.

While they played their games, the older teens stood around and talked about their plans for the upcoming school year. Robin and Steve were both still looking for new jobs, and Nancy and Jonathan were excited to enter their senior year of high school.

On the back porch, Joyce sat next to Hopper, slowly stroking his hand as she looked at him enamored. He noticed and turned his head to look at her. She blushed a bit and smiled at him. "You still find this attractive?" he asked jokingly, tilting his head up to indicate his bandaged face.

She giggled and he grinned even more. Joyce Byers just *giggled at him*. She smiled and squeezed his hand. "I do find it very attractive," she laughed with him for a few seconds. "So, I know we missed our date, but I was thinking once you're out of that wheelchair, we could go?"

He nodded and looked at her happily, his trademark grin sneaking onto his face. Joyce couldn't resist leaning in and kissing his cheek as best she could. She pulled away as she heard a squeal coming from across the yard. She looked over and saw Eleven pointing at them.

"Dad! She kissed you!"

Hopper started laughing, bending over a bit in his wheelchair as Joyce began to giggle at the silliness of it all. They were happy, and they were together.

Hours later, most everyone had gone home. The only people left were Eleven, Jonathan, Will, Joyce and Hopper. Hopper was outside on the back porch enjoying a cigarette, something he had sorely missed during his stay at the hospital. The kids and Joyce were busy cleaning up inside when Mike noticed Hopper was alone. He told El he would be right back and dried his hand off before opening and going through the sliding glass door out to the patio. Hopper heard the door and turned around to face him. "You need something?" he asked before turning back around.

Mike moved in front of him and shook his head. "No Hop, uh- sir. I don't need anything," he said, his hands fidgeting at his sides.

Hopper took a long puff of his cigarette before exhaling the smoke. "What is it then?"

Mike took a deep breath before continuing. "I just wanted to say I was sorry."

Hopper furrowed his brow. "For what?"

"Just for being disrespectful and a complete jerk to you. I was angry at you for keeping her away from me and I was angry you kept me thinking she was dead. But I understand why you did that now. It was an impossible circumstance and you did what you thought was best Sir. I was a little shithead and I shouldn't have called you names and made Eleven do things that I knew would make you angry. I should've been more respectful of you and your rules. I understand why you tried to break me and Eleven up," he paused. "And we could've chilled it out with the making out in front of you a bit too," he added, cutting himself off before he rambled further. He stood up and looked down at Hopper as he smoked his cigarette and looked at him.

Hopper sighed, putting out his cigarette and motioned to a chair next to him, waiting until Mike sat down to continue. "Listen kid, you



were a little shithead, but I could've done better too, and I forgive you. Keeping you two apart for that long was a mistake and I should've tried harder to let you know she was okay, and I should've tried to set boundaries with you and El at the beginning, and I shouldn't have lost my temper like that and tried to break you two up. I never really realized how serious you two are. I thought you were just two teenagers trying to get some action," he laughed as Mike blushed. "I know that's all I was interested in at your age. But with you two, it's something I don't think a lot of married couples even feel for one another. You love her, don't you?" he asked Mike.

Mike nodded, looking back at Hop. "I do. I love her so much."

Hopper nodded. "Look, someday soon, the three of us will sit down and talk about what's allowed and what isn't. I trust you Mike. Even if you two do make out, I know you're not a stupid teenager, not like I was. You won't hurt her."

"I would never Sir."

Hopper shook his head. "Kid, I'm glad you're going to respect me from now on, but cut the sir bullshit. It's Hop, okay?"

Mike nodded. "Alright Hop."

Hopper smiled at him and held out his good hand. "Let's just agree that we both want the best for El alright? She lost so many years of her life in that lab. We can never get those years back, but we can make her life as amazing as possible."

Mike shook his hand and smiled. "It's a deal."

Two days later, the three of them sat around the Hopper's new living room. It was almost a parallel of that fateful night almost a month ago at this point, with Mike and Eleven sitting hand in hand on the sofa while Hopper sat across from them on a chair and talked to them about boundaries and what was and wasn't okay.

He had a piece of paper he glanced at a few times during his speech, but for the most part he just seemed to be speaking from the heart. "I think talking about this is important because I care about you two,

and you two obviously love one another, and I think these boundaries and rules will help us all be more comfortable around each other when it comes to your relationship and our feelings."

He paused for a second and made sure they were both still listening before continuing. "I guess it's been a while since I felt the way you two do about anyone. It's like I've been stuck in one place, almost like a dark cave where nothing ever changes. But then I left some Eggos out in the woods and you came into my life," he said, gesturing to Eleven, who smiled and went to sit by her dad as he continued. "I finally felt happy again, I finally felt like I had a purpose again. But I guess lately I've been feeling distance from you. I miss playing board games with you and making triple decker eggo extravaganzas and watching Westerns together," he said, feeling his daughter hug him around his waist in apology.

He ruffled her hair and smiled a bit. "But I also know you're growing up and changing, and I guess if I'm being honest that scares me, it scares me to see you being a normal teenage girl who likes to kiss her boyfriend. It feels like yesterday that I had just found you and was teaching you to write. I guess a part of me wants to turn back the clock and go back to that, but I know that isn't how life works. It's moving, always moving, whether you like it or not. And yeah, sometimes it's painful. Sometimes it's sad. And sometimes, it's surprising. Sometimes it's Happy."

"So you know what? I want you to keep on growing kid. Don't let me stop you. I want you to make mistakes, learn from 'em. When life hurts you, because it will, remember the hurt. The hurt is good. It means you're out of that cave," he said, smiling as he looked down at his daughter who had a few tears in her eyes, and across at Mike who looked moved as well. "But, please, if you don't mind, for the sake of your poor old dad, keep the door open three inches," he said, finishing his speech and set the paper down. "I want you two to be together okay? I want you two to be happy. Just please try to follow my rules for a few more years, okay?" he asked.

Both kids nodded and smiled at him. "Sure thing Hop."